

CHAPTER II

HISTORY

Ancient Period

Kurukshetra is as old as the history of India. The history of the area in which Kurukshetra district lies can be traced back, howsoever dimly at times to the ancient Aryan Past. According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, “it was a religion-cultural centre even before the immigration of the Aryans into India”¹.

The pre-Harappans and the Harappans were the earliest people inhabiting the district as is gathered from the discovery of their pottery from some sites in Kurukshetra and its adjoining areas². It is not possible to attempt any reconstruction of these earliest inhabitations on the basis of this slender evidence. The next phase of the material culture of the district is marked by the discovery of Later-Harappan Ware (c.1700-1500 B.C.) from as many as sixty three sites³, some of which have been systematically excavated. A brief account of the excavated sites and the valuable evidence which they have brought to light is as follows.-

The ancient mound near village Daulatpur is of a moderate size; rising to a height of nearly 6 metres. It lies by the side of *nullah*, branching off from the *Chutang* (ancient *Drishadvati*). It is approached via Kurukshetra-Saharanpur road and is about 15 Kms. from Thanesar. The earliest settlement at the site represents a late phase of Indus Civilization (c.1700-1500 B.C.). The period was characterized by the use of typical sturdy, red coloured pottery, painted in black and decorated with geometric and linear designs. The evolved shapes, inferior treatment of the surface and the simpler and fewer decorations on the pottery indicate a decadent stage of the Indus

¹ B.K.Muztar, “Kurukshetra Political and Cultural History,P.7 (Delhi)

² Suraj Bhan, Pre-historical Archaeology of Sarasvati and Drishadvati Vallies, Baroda University Ph.D. Dissertaton, 1972, MSS and Man Mohan Kumar, Archaeology of Ambala and Kurukshetra Districts, Haryana, 1978, Kurukshetra University Ph.D. Thesis, MSS.

³ Ibid.

culture. The material equipment of the period included the remains of round ovens, charred grains, grinding stones, bone engravers and copper bangles. The copper fish-hook and bone points suggest that hunting and fishing supplemented the food supply of the people. The folk in this period decorated their persons with ornaments like bangles of faience and terracotta and beads of semi-precious.

Toward the beginning of the first millennium B.C., with the advent of the Painted Grey ware culture (so-called because of its typical fine grey pottery painted with black designs) a new chapter preponderantly found all over the district (at as many as seventy eight sites discovered so far) is associated with the later *vedic* period, specially the age of the Mahabharata¹.

For long, scholars were puzzled over the clear branch between the Harappans and the Aryans but the Bhagwanpura excavations² (on the right bank of the River Saraswati in the district) have established for the first time the link between the two cultures. This is of considerable importance for the understanding of the historical growth of the district from the middle of the second millennium B.C.³ The late-Harappan pottery discovered at Bhagwanpura is similar to that found at Mirzapur and Daulatpur. The people knew the art of building solid mud-platforms to protect their inhabitation from the ravages of floods in the River Saraswati, which their pottery gives a fairly good idea of household objects, dishes, bowls, jars and basins, terracotta toys, beads and bangles. The fusion of the Late-Harappans and the Painted Grey ware cultures is also reflected in the continuity of the art tradition in pottery types, painted designs, art of terracotta figurines and burials. Absence of iron and Black and Red ware might possibly indicate that the Painted Grey ware using people who inhabited this area were of earlier wave of migrants than those met with at Hastinapura⁴. Further, the Bhagwanpura excavations also throw light on three phases of the building activity of the Painted Grey ware people. The earliest phase revealed semi-circular thatched huts and

¹ B.B.Lal, Excavations at Hastinapur and other Explorations in the Upper Ganga and Sutlej Basin, 1950-52, Ancient India (1954-55).

² J.P.Joshi, 'A Note on the Excavation at Bhagwanpura', Puratattva, No.8, 1975-76, pp.178-80.

³ Ibid., p.180.

⁴ Ibid., p.180.

oval shaped structures of high burnt mud walls. The second phase is marked by the building of mud walled houses (as known from a complete house complex of thirteen rooms, corridor and a courtyard). The room yielded animal bones, Painted Grey ware dishes and bowls. *Ghata*-shaped terracotta beads, bone *styli* and copper objects. Significantly, 2 to 5 percent of late-Harappan pottery was also available from the rooms of this house complex. The third phase gives evidence of the existence of houses built of baked bricks. Two curious oval shaped structures which are also associated with this phase perhaps suggest some religious purpose. Besides this, two skeletons of an adult and a child have been found from the Painted Grey ware habitation area. The different levels of the site reveal variety of animal bones -bull, sheep, goat, ram, dog, and equus suggesting their animal and cattle wealth¹. The evidence of the Bhagwanpura excavation is thus invaluable for the reconstruction of the earliest phases of the archaeology and history of the district.

The city was known to the *Rigveda* after its sacred tank Saryanavat (identified with Brahmasara), the centre of numerous legends (connected with Indra, sage Dadhichi, Asvins and the non-Aryan God Vritra) wherein question regarding ultimate, reality, origin of universe and manifestation of nature in intelligible and beautiful forms were raised and answered².

The advent of the Aryans makes the history of Kurukshetra coherent and meaningful. They gave to India its name *Bharta*, and to Kurukshetra, both its name as well as its religious character. In a collection of hymns of the *Maitrayani Samhita*, Kurukshetra is first mentioned by name as a place of divine sacrifices (*Dava ka vai satra mastra Kurukshetra*). Thus the antiquity of Kurukshetra even on the basis of literary tradition alone is more than 3,000 years³.

¹ J.P.Joshi, 'A Note on the Excavations at Bhagwanpura' Puratattva No.8, 1975-76,pp. 178-80.

² H.A.Phadke, 'Saryanavat', All India Oriental Conference, Kurukshetra, 1974, Proceedings (History Section).

³ V.N.Datta & H.A.Phadke, History of kurukshetra, 1984,pp.7-8, H.A.Phadke, 'Kurukshetra, its Importance, origin and Antiquity', Journal of Haryana Studies, 1974, VI. Nos.1-2, Kurukshetra: A Historical Reconstructions, the Quarterly Review of Historical Studies, Calcutta, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 1983-84, P.23.

The tract which came to be called Kurukshetra, was originally inhabited by the Bharatas, the most powerful tribe of the *Rigvedic* period. The Bharatas, known for their valour and love of learning, waged the battle of the ten kings defeating the Purus on the Parushni (Ravi)¹. Later on, in the process of assimilation among tribes, the Kurus emerged as a distant people. In the making of Kurukshetra, the Kurus made a distinct contribution by their excellence in military skill, by their idealism and innate literary and spiritual reserves².

The Bharata battle which was fought at Kurukshetra has inspired highly sophisticated and subtle philosophical thought. In the popular mind, Kurukshetra is the place where the most revered of the Hindu sacred text, the *Bhagavadgita* was expounded. Both on the historicity and the date of the Bharata war, there has been much controversy and speculation amongst scholars. Largely, the controversy has arisen due to the conflicting nature of evidence - literary, archaeological and astronomical. But a critical and comparative study of these sources leads to a reasonable inference that the battle was an actual historical event extending roughly over the area covering Kaithal, Pehowa, Thanesar and Amin and took place in all probability between 1200-1000 B.C.³

Any attempt at the search of the actual place where Lord Krishna expounded his philosophy would be futile unless satisfactory answers are found to a few basic questions. Firstly, what was the original *Gita* which represented the period when the battle was fought? Secondly, what were the different phases of the earlier thought which culminated in the philosophy of the *Gita* and finally, what part of this holy land of Kurukshetra is particularly associated with the spiritual evolution⁴? For the present, we can only suggest that the place which can possibly deserve this distinction is the area round

¹ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984.

² Ibid, pp.14-18.

³ H.A.Phadke, Kurukshetra: A Historical Reconstruction, Quarterly Review of Historical Studies, Calcutta., Vol.XXIII To. 1, 1983-84; 'Date of Bharata War', (in Mahabharata: Myth and Reality Ed. S.P.Gupta and S.K.Ramachandran, Delhi 1976, and also his Press Notes September 20, 1975, 'The Indian Express', October, 28, 1975.

⁴ H.A.Phadke, Haryana Ancient and Medieval, Delhi, 1990, p.20.

the sacred tank (Brahmasara) which came to prominence as a centre of philosophical speculation long before the Mahabharata¹. According to the Mahabharata², the battle took place at Samanta-panchaka (another name of the holy tank) and this is probably the place where the divine message was delivered.

The enlightenment which Arjuna sought and received has come down to people through the *Bhagavadgita* the most sacred Hindu religious text, its other names *Brahmavidya*, *Yogasastra* and *Upanishad* indicate that it was not really a sudden isolated creation but had behind it centuries of meditation, the tradition of philosophical speculation nurtured since the *Vedas*, the Brahmins, and the *Upanishads* reaching its culmination at Dharmakshetra- Kurukshetra³. The holy books open with the verse that Kurukshetra (the land of Kurus) is Dharmashetra (the land of righteousness).

It is not intended here to summarize the basic teachings of this great book though, for understanding its philosophy, one ought to consult authoritative work on it. But here only two comments are made. The Gita is both simple and philosophical, simple for those, who devoid of subtlety of thought and philosophical niceties, still guide for their life through contemplations; and philosophical for those who trained in the quest of deep speculation appreciate keenly its metaphysical character and sublimity of profound thinking⁴.

For the religious, social, and economic conditions in Kurukshetra under the Kauravas and Pandavas, one has to depend on Mahabharata- the only source of our information. The Mahabharata speaks highly of the character of the people, their adherence to *dharma* and their material prosperity which is indicated by the fertility of soil, abundance of water and vegetation⁵. According to the *Puranic* story, the Kuru and his people did make every effort to make their land prosperous. In the Mahabharata, the stage king Kuru cultivated this land with passionate devotion. The *Vamanapurana* describes the courage intensive devotion and asceticism of Kuru and elaborates to the King's cultivation of the eight-fold ethical conduct (*ashtanga-*

¹ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.30.

² Mahabharata (Gorakhpur Ed.), 1.2. 13.

³ Ibid 1.2. 13.

⁴ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984. p.30.

⁵ Ibid,p.31

mahadharmā) of austerity (*tapas*), truth (*satya*), forgiveness (*kshama*), kindness (*daya*) purity (*shaucha*), charity (*dana*), Yoga and continence (*brahmacharya*). Those traditions point out Kuru's crucial role in the cause of the regeneration of his people. By his emphasis on the growth of agriculture and cultivation of moral conduct, the twin pillars of material prosperity and spiritual elevation, Kuru laid the foundation of that type of culture which was spiritual without being unworldly and material without being avaricious. It was this culture which was considered later on by the Manu-samhita as worthy of emulation by humanity all over the world¹. The Kurus were well known for material spirit and sound *agrarian* economy². Tributes were paid to the material qualities of the Kurus by Panini³ and Kautilya.

According to the *Puranas*, the Bharata was left with the Pandavas as the supreme political power in the North. Yudhishtira ruled for some time. Later on, they were succeeded by the Arjuna's grandson Prikshit (son of Abhimanyu) who was acclaimed as a universal king in whose kingdom milk and honey flowed⁴. The glorious reign of Parikshit (c-900 B.C.) ended with his tragic fall in the struggle with Takshaka, the Naga King of Taxila, whose brother Asvasena had earlier fought the Pandavas in the war. His defeat was avenged by Parikshita's son Janamejaya, who conquered Taxila and performed a snake sacrifice. Tradition has it that this event took place at Sarpidarvi or Sarpadaman (the present Safidon town in Jind district). The Mahabharata states that Janamejaya sometimes held his court at Taxila where Vaisampayana narrated the story of the war⁵. He had ruled over this region for a long time-about eighty years. After his death, it seems that Kurus began to experience a fall in their fortunes. They were divided into three lines-one of them held sway in Hastinapur, the other in Khandava and the third, i.e. Kurukshetra. As a result of this division and other such factors, the Kurukshetra region began to lose its importance⁶. The natural calamities which visited the

¹ Haryana State Gazetteer, Vol.II, 2004, p.173.

² V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.41.

³ Ashtodhyagi, IX. I.P.178.

⁴ Arthshastra, VII.10.14; VIII,14.

⁵ B.K.Muztar, Kurukshetra Political and Cultural History,1978, pp. 49-50.

⁶ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p. 36.37.

Kurus kingdom must have considerably affected Kurus outlook of life. The Kuru-Panchalas whose approach to life was material now, became spiritually minded and were later converted as the followers of the heterodox teachings of Mahavira and Budha¹. Even under the changing outlook, the Kurus retained and cherished the basic values of life, spiritual knowledge, justice, truth and rectitude.

During the 6th century B.C., the region Kurukshetra came under the influence of Buddhism. The Buddhist literature does not throw any light on the political fortunes of Kurukshetra during this period. At one or two places in Buddhist literature, there is a little reference of this region, but it does not represent a particular locality. During Buddha's time, a Kuru Chief was called *Koyoya* and his debates with the elder Ratthapala (a scion of the family of Kurus) are embodied in the Ratthapala Sutra (the Buddhist Text). It appears that the Kuru kingdom extended to Uttanapanchala - a town in Kururatha with Renu as its King².

For the expulsion of Macedonian garrisons and the overthrow of the Nanda, Chandragupta recruited the main force of his army from this region which might possibly have included the soldiers of the district³. During 4th century B.C., the district formed part of the extensive Nanda Empire and was included in the Administrative Division called Uttarapatha under the Mauryas⁴. This finds confirmation in the discovery of Northern Block Polished Ware from Barot, Dhantori, Jalkheri and Narakatri from the district. Under the administration of Chandragupta, the people of Kurukshetra region enjoyed peace and security. In his early life, Ashoka passed through the district as the Head of a large army to pacify the rebellious people of Taksasils and it was again through this region that Ashoka's harbingers carried their Master's message of peace to the western world⁵. The importance of the area during the reign of Ashoka is further testified by his construction of a *stupa* at Thanesar. The

¹ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, pp.36.37.

² Ibid. p.39.

³ Ibid. p. 42.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Manmohan Kumar, Archaeology of Kurukshetra and Ambala District, pp. 56, 65, 69, 72-73, Haryana, 1978, MSS Kurukshetra University, Ph. D. Thesis.

location and importance of the *stupa* is described by Hiuen Tsiang as follows¹:-

“To the North-west of the city (Sthanesvara) 4 or 5 li is a stupa, about 300 feet high, which was built by Ashokaraja. The bricks are all of yellowish red colour, very bright and shining, within is a peak measure of the relics of Buddha. From the stupa is frequently emitted brilliant light and many spiritual prodigies exhibit themselves”.

The *stupa* mentioned in the above account may be located towards the Aujasghat near the Saraswati bed where still a few mounds are seen thickly covered with large broken bricks of reddish or yellowish-red colour. In absence of excavation, it is not possible to say anything more on it². Cunningham also stated “It is probably that the smaller mound may be the remains of the *stupa* from which the larger pieces of the bricks have been carried away, and the larger mound may be the ruins of an extensive monastery³.”

During the second century B.C., the people of the region resisted the Bactrian-Greeks and in the subsequent period overthrew the Kushanas under the Yaudheyas who revived its ancient values, martial spirit, love for Sanskrit learning and the curious blend of material and altruistic interests. The importance of the region as a seat of Vedic culture and religion was well recognized by the *Manusmriti*⁴ and the *Mahabharata*⁵. This is attested to by some archaeological evidence thrown from the sites of Raja-Karna-ka-Qilla, Mirzapur and Theh Polar. (*Theh Polar site falls in Kaithal Distt.*)

Raja-Karna-ka-Qilla has brought to light some very important finds - a clay seal depicting a beautiful Indian bull and an inscription of five letters, probably in *Kharosthi* script, and Indo-Bactrian large silver coin of Harmaios, Agra coin bearing the legend *Agodaka*

¹ Buddhist Records of the Western World, Eng. Translation, Samuel Beal, 1969, p.186.

² V.N. Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p.44.

³ A. Cunningham, Archaeological Survey of India, Reports, Vol. II (1962-65), 1972, pp.220-21.

⁴ Manu, II, 17, 18-20.

⁵ Mahabharata, VIII, 45,46.

Agacha Janapadasa (coins of the Agratya or Agra Janapada) issued from Agrodaka (Agroha).

The earlier Yaudheya coins in this region were found at Khokrakot, Bhiwani, Naurangabad, Hansi, Hisar and Behat, which show the limits of their territory. These coins referring to the title of their rulers, the name of their tribe and also their land known as Bahudhana or Bahudhanayaka. Towards the end of the second century B.C. or in the beginning of the first century B.C., the Yaudheya rule in the area was replaced by that of the Indo-Greeks, a number of those coins have been discovered from Raja Karna-Ka-Tilla, Theh Polar (Kaithal district) Sugh and Jagadhari¹ (Yamunanagar district). The legends of these coins bear the names of thirteen Indo-Greek Kings-Menander, Antialcidas, Amyntas, Antimachus, Diomedes, Polyxenus, Philoxenus, Hysias, Strato, heliocles, Hermacus, Agathocles and Joilus i.e. more than half of the known Indo-Greek Kings of both the lines. The Indo-Greek rule in its turn seems to have been supplanted by that of Sakas. The Sakas ruled over this region probably towards the last quarter of the first century B.C. or in the beginning of the first century A.D. the Sakas rule in the region may precisely be fixed somewhere between c.20 B.C. and A.D. 250 admitting that they did not rule during this period.

It seems that Kurukshetra was included in the empire of the Kushans whose rule in Northern India extends as far as Mathura and Varanasi. The Theh Polar (Kaithal district) an ancient site on the Southern bank of the River Saraswati, has yielded some coins of the Kushana Vasudeva and two debased copper coins bearing the Kushana types of Ring at an altar. The Kushana sway over the area is also attested by the recent discovery of a board of about 5000 copper coins from Sonipat, which relate to the time of Kanishka I, Havishka, Vasudeva, the Kushan chiefs and also the Yaudheyas².

The Mirzapur site has also shown remains of the early centuries of the Christian era but these are not as extensive as found at the other sites mentioned above. The excavation has exposed mud brick walls and floors made of bricks. The other important finds of the period are two moulds of punch-marked coins; Kushana terracotta's

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p.16.

² Ibid.

representing the typical art of the age, shell-bangles, bone objects and glazed animal figurines. The typical Red Polished ware of early centuries was found in abundance here. The excavation revealed that after the occupation of the Late-Harappans, the site remained uninhabited for a long time and after early historical period also there was a long gap in occupation¹. The Daulatpur site has also provided evidence of Plain Grey and other early historical potteries and also the typical Red Polished ware of the Saka-Kushana period². Chas Rodgers has reported to have collected Indo-Scythian, Kuninda, Gondopharnes and Kushana coins from the Thanesar tehsil³. Coins of Gondopharnes and Yaudheyas have also been recovered from Raja-Karna-Ka-Qilla and that of Vasudeva from Teora (Thanesar)⁴.

The evidence from the above archaeological sites which have come in the form of structural remains, pottery, art objects, coins, seals and sealings may not be adequate for a historical reconstruction of the district till the rise of the Guptas to power but these are sufficient at least to show that the region came under foreign influence which was partly resisted by the local rulers like Yajajita and Kuninda Amoghabhuti but more effectively by the Yaudheyas, whose coins have been found in large number from the district. The discovery of their coins in conjunction with the Kushana coins suggests the replacement of the Kushanas by the Yaudheyas.

According to Altekar⁵, the Yaudheyas in their second attempt towards the end of the second century A.D. succeeded in subjugating the Kushanas beyond the Sutlej and making their homeland free from them. Their success over the Kushanas is attested to by their coin legend '*Yaudheya-Ganasya- Jayah*' (victory to the Yaudheya Republic)⁶. Other republic which perhaps collaborated with Yaudheyas in the region in their struggle against the Kushanas was

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, pp. 27-28.

² U.V. Singh, 'Archaeology of Kurukshetra', Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, Kurukshetra, 1974.

³ C. Rodgers, Report of the Panjab Circle of the Archaeological Survey (1988-89), Calcutta, 1891.

⁴ Man Mohan Kumar, Archaeology of Ambala and Kurukshetra District Haryana, 1978, MSS, Kurukshetra University, Ph.D. Thesis, pp. 209, 212.

⁵ A.S. Altekar, A New History of the Indian People, VI, 1946, pp. 21-29.

⁶ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p. 49.

that of the Kunindas who were settled between the Sutlej and the Yamuna and whose coins have been recovered from Pehowa and the adjoining Ambala district¹. The Kunindas later seem to have lost their independent existence probably because of their fusion under the expanding republic of the Yaudheyas². This received additional support from the *Prayaga Prasasti* of Samudragupta which in the context of the consequents mentions the Yaudheyas but not the Kunindas³. There seems, therefore, no doubt that by the end of the third century A.D., the Yaudheyas were also dominant in the Kurukshetra region. Although removed from political scene by the conquests of Samudragupta, the Yaudheyas were regarded as a brave people enjoying great material prosperity so as to draw the attention of Somadeva, a Jain author under the patronage of a feudatory Chalukya dynasty of the Rastrakutas during the tenth century A.D. The poet gives a vivid and sensitive picture of the peace, affluence and culture in the Kurukshetra region under the Yaudheyas⁴.

During the Gupta period Kurukshetra developed for the first time into a seat of political power. The royal seat was called Sthanavisvara after its famous deity who was worshipped by the ruling dynasty of the Pushpabhutis.

Kurukshetra formed a part of the Gupta kingdom. According to R.C. Majumdar, Samudragupta's empire extended upto Punjab in the west, which included probably its eastern districts between Lahore and Karnal⁵. His conquest of the Yaudheyas has already been mentioned. The Guptas hold over the Kurukshetra region continued during the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya, whose expeditions to the Punjab and Bactria are recounted in the Maharauli pillar inscription. His silver coins are found in plenty all over Eastern Punjab as far as the banks of Chenab, and his Mathura inscription

¹ C. Rogers, Report of the Punjab Circle of the Archaeology Survey (1888-89), Calcutta, 1891, list, pp.3-4; Man Mohan Kumar, Archaeology of Ambala and Kurukshetra District, Haryana, 1978, MSS Kurukshetra University, Ph.D. Thesis, pp. 202-4.

² V.N.Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p. 50.

³ Ibid and Allahabad Pillar Inscription, lines 22-3.

⁴ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p. 51; Somadeva; Yasagtilaka-Champu, Kavyamala 70, Bombay, 1901, pp. 12-21.

⁵ The Classical Age, R.C. Majumdar (Ed) Bombay, 1954, p.9.

dated A.D. 380 leaves no doubt that he consolidated the North-Western dominions of the Gupta empire from Jullundur Doab to Mathura¹. Despite these precautionary measures, the region was lost to the Gupta Empire much before Skandagupta's reign when the empire was threatened by external and internal dangers succumbed to the Huna incursions into this area². The Guptas encounter with the Hunas finds mention in Skandagupta's inscriptions³. Altekar⁴ thinks that the battle took place on the bank of the Yamuna. If valid, this contention would suggest that Kurukshetra region also suffered the Hunas invasion in this period. However, Prince Skandagupta took the challenge and by his courage and heroism suppressed the Hunas before A.D. 457-58⁵. Epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidences on the Huna rule over an extensive area under Toramana and Mihirakula suggest that parts of the district might possibly have gone under their hold⁶.

During this period of struggle for political power in northern India, Pushpabhuti founded a new dynasty in Thanesar *bhukti* (Administrative Division) a part of Kurukshetra, then known as Srikantha *Janapada*. Due to the political disintegration on the fall of the Gupta Empire, the Pushpabhuti dynasty rose to power.

The early rulers of the dynasty probably served under the Guptas but, with changing circumstances, they demonstrated allegiance to the Hunas who were gaining ascendancy in northern regions. After the defeat to the Hunas, it might have been possible for them to establish their independent principality. According to Bana, Pushpabhuti was the founder of the Vardhana dynasty. On the basis of Hiuen Tsiang and the Buddhist work Manjusrimulakpa the rulers of

¹ D.C. Sirkar, Select Inscriptions Vol.I, pp.276, 270-71; R.D. Banerji, The Age of the Imperial Guptas, Banaras, 1933, p.30; R.N. Dandekar, A History of the Guptas, 1941, pp. 81-82.

² V.N. Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p.55.

³ D.C. Sirkar, Select Inscriptions, Vol.I, pp.299 f, 312 f; Upendar Thakur, The Hunas in India, 1967,p.75.

⁴ A.S.Altekar, Bayana Hoard of Gupta Coins, Introduction, pp. XXXIII-XXXIV.

⁵ V.N. Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra,p.56.

⁶ H.A.Phadke, 'Kurukshetra during the Sixth Century A.D' Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol. V, Part I and II, 1973, p.,9.

the dynasty belonged to the *Vaisya* caste (Fe-She)¹. The genealogy of the dynasty in the inscription of Harsha found from Barakhera about 25 kilometres from Shahjahanpur (U.P.) has been preserved in State Museum at Lucknow.

The first three rulers assumed the title of the Maharaja indicating their feudatory status. According to R.C. Majumdar, they flourished between A.D. 500 and 580². Because the Pushpabhutis did not assume imperial titles even after the downfall of the Gupta and the Hunas, there is reason to believe that they were also the feudatories of the Maukharis, the ruling dynasty at Kanauj. The foundation of an independent kingdom with Thanesar as its capital took place after Isanavarman's death when the Maukhari power was much reduced³. Although Harsha's inscriptions provide names of the queens of the four early rulers, it is not possible in the present state of knowledge to specify the dynasties to which they belonged. The inscriptions, however, provide definite information about the religious leaning of the rulers. The first ruler does not bear any religious title, the next three are called *Purana Adityabhakta* (great devotees of the sun) Rajyavardhana is called a great devotee of Sugata i.e. Buddha, while Harshavardhana is styled as a great devotee of Mahesvara⁴. Adityavardhana, the third ruler, was highly influential, for his queen Mahasenagupta, as the name would indicate, was the sister of Mahasenagupta, a later-Gupta ruler of Magadha and later of Malwa. The close relationship between the two dynasties can also be gathered from the *Harshacharita* and Apsad inscription⁵. The matrimonial alliance thus gave to the Pushpabhuti dynasty an imperial status.

¹ Harshacharita, Ed. Parab, pp.99-112 and 187; Watter Travels of Yuan Chwang, pp. 343-44; Aryamanjusrimul-akalpa Ed. T. Ganapatishastri, 1925, III, p. 626; H.A. Phadke, Kurukshetra during the Sixth Century A.D. Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol. V, Part I & II, 1973, pp. 9-10.

² The Classical Age, Ed. R.C.Majumdar, Bombay, 1957, p. 97.

³ H.A. Phadke, Kurukshetra During the Sixth Century A.D. Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol.V Part I and II, 1973.

⁴ Epigraphia Indica, Vol. I, p.67 f; Vol. IV, p.208 f

⁵ H.A. Phadke, Kurukshetra During the Sixth Century A.D. Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol. V Part I and II, 1973

The Inscriptions¹ of Harsha and Bana's *Harshachartia*² provide a graphic account of Prabhakarvardhan's courage, beneficent disposition, military campaigns, patronage of religion and above all, the peace and prosperity enjoyed by the people under his rule. Bana's *Harshachartia* is a valuable source of ancient tradition and record of contemporary history. From the account of Bana, it is clear that Prabhakarvardhana was also known as *Pratapasila*, a title which appears on the coins found in village Bhitara (in Faizabad district of U.P.). The discovery of these coins with those of Siladitya (the title of Harsa) and of Maukhari rulers support such an identity³. Prabhakarvardhan was the first strong ruler of Kurukshetra region. He was a skillful warrior well versed in the art of diplomacy. He embarked upon a bold foreign policy which made him the greatest ruler of the then Punjab (including present Haryana) and of the northwest of India. He made alliance with the Maukharis of Kanauj and married his daughter Rajyasri with their prince Grahavarman. Consequently, with their support, Prabhakarvardhana not only vanquished the Hunas but also tightened his grip over the Indus region and asserted his influence over Gandhara and put down turbulent Gurjaras.

During the closing period of his life when the kingdom of Thanesar was threatened by another Huna invasion from the north, Prabhakarvardhana sent Rajyavardhana to repulse it. Harsha also left to assist his brother, but has to return hurriedly after learning about the serious illness of his father. The *Harshacharita* dilates upon the circumstances leading to the end of queen Yasomati and the King. The date of Prabhakarvardhana's death cannot be determined; possibly it was a round A.D. 605⁴.

Rajyavardhana succeeded to the throne but could not live in peace. His brother-in-law was murdered. Grahavarman of Kanauj and his sister Rajyashri were arrested by the king of Malva, a friend of

¹ Epigraphia indica, Vol.I, p.67f, Vol.IV, p. 208f.

² Harshacharita, Ed. Parab, pp.120-21; H.A.Phadke, Harshacharita: A source of the History of Haryana, Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1972.

³ Burn, "Some Coins of the Maukhari and Thanesar Line, A Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, 1906, p.843 f.

⁴ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, p.62.

Sasanka, the Gauda king. Rajyavardhana started immediately with Bhandi (his cousin) to wreak vengeance upon the king of Malva and advised Harsha to stay back and manage the kingdom. Rajyavardhana defeated the Malva king and recovered Kanauj. It has been alleged by the court poet of Thanesar that Rajyavardhana was allured into confidence by false civilities and treacherously murdered by the King of Gauda.

Harsa, on coming to the throne, had to avenge the death of his elder brother and predecessor, rescued his sister and consolidated his authority in the two kingdoms.

According to Bana, Harsa took oath at the foot of his grand old minister Simhanda for the subjugation of the Gaudas and all haughty and proud rulers. First of all, he inflicted defeat on Sansanka, the king of Gauda, who had murdered his brother Rajyavardhana and was on ally of Deva Gupta. Then he recovered his sister Rajyashri in the forests of Vindhya.

With the transfer of Varkhana capital from Thanesar to Kanauj, the political importance of the region declined for about a century or so but Kurukshetra and Thanesar continued to retain religious importance.

As regards the extent of kingdom of Harsha, the Historians differ. M. Ettinghansen and Panikkar, the two modern Biographers of Harsha, regard him as sovereign of the whole of Northern India; the latter specifically describes Harsha's empire as having extended from Kamarupa to Kashmir and the Himalayas to the Vindhya. The more moderate estimate of V.A. Smith excludes from this area Kashmir, Punjab, Sindh, Rajputana and Kamarupa for the simple reason that Hiuen Tsiang clearly refers to them as independent kingdom, and even mentions the states that were subordinate to some of them¹. Harsha's kingdom merely comprised the territories of the old states of Thanesar and Kanauj, though he probably added some small principalities to the north and west. It may be said to have comprised the Eastern Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Towards the close of his reign, he had annexed Magadha and even pushed his conquests as far as Orissa and Kengoda².

¹ History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. III, The Classical Age, Ed. R.C. Majumdar, 1970, p. 112.

² Ibid, p.113.

In his latter days, he sought to emulate, perhaps unconsciously, the great Ashoka, and Chinese pilgrims bear eloquent testimony to his pious foundations, his toleration, liberality and benevolence, all irrespective of caste and creed. The secrets of prosperity of the then Haryana was the fertility of its soil, abundance of its crops and vegetation, its cattle wealth and hospitality and generosity of its people. It was just like 'heaven descended upon earth'. The capital of the region was the splendid city of Sthanvisvara. Bana depicts the variety and richness of the life of the city. He gives an account of its sages and soldiers, the dress and ornamentation of its women, its trading community and artists, its scientists and philosophers, its temples, monasteries, bazaars, emporia, palaces, forts, schools and colleges.

Hiuen Tsang's Si-Yu-Ki (Or the Buddhist records of the Western World) is yet another vital source of information about Thanesar. Hiuen-Tsang wrote as follows:-

"The kingdom is about 7000 li (3 li-1.6 km. or 1 mile) in circuit, the capital 20 li or so. The soil is rich and productive, and abounds with grains (cereals). The climate is genial though hot. The families are rich and given to excessive luxury. They are much addicted to the use of magical arts, and greatly honour those of distinguished ability in other ways. Most of the people follow after worldly gains, a few give themselves to agricultural pursuits. There is a large accumulation here of rare and valuable merchandise from every quarter. There are three Samgharamas (monasteries) in this country with about 700 priests. They all study (practice or use) the little vehicle (Hinayana). There are some hundred Deva temples, and sectaries of various kinds in great number."

The adventurous spirit, scholarly temperament and administrative acumen of the people of Kurukshetra were known as far as Laos and Cambodia as is gathered from two inscriptions found there. The inscription from Laos of the time of Maharajadhiraja Sri Devanika refers to founding of a *mahatirtha* to be known Kurukshetra by the king (in the second half of the fifth century A.D.) The

Prah Vihar inscription dated A.D. 1037-38 refers to a man, the Keeper of Royal Archives, as a native of Kurukshetra, who, for the excellent services rendered, was recommended by King Sukaraman for the grant of a village named Vibheda which was renamed as Kurukshetra. The evidence thus suggests migration of the people of Kurukshetra to the Southeast Asian countries and their founding new town after their native place. The tradition of sanctity, culture and history of Kurukshetra is permanently preserved in that region¹.

The death of Harsh in A.D.647-8 unleashed a storm of fissiparous forces which engulfed the whole of north India. What became of Srikantha or Haryana is not precisely known but it appears that people from the north, Hunas and Turks made intrusion into Punjab. Hence towards the end of that century, Yasovarman of Kanauj campaigning in Srikantha, Marudesa and Kurukshetra tried to ward them off.

Kurukshetra seems to have formed a part of the kingdom of Kanauj under Yasovarman (c.A.D.690-740). His court poet Vakpatiraja described the march of his army through Srikantha and Kurukshetra and his victories over the Parasikas (i.e. the Arabs). The Korean Buddhist pilgrim Hui-Chao also confirms Arab invasion of Western India about A.D. 725. Yasovarman had made special arrangement for the proper administration of the northern region which included Kurukshetra. Yasovarman's hold over the region was replaced soon by the Kashmir Ruler Lalitaditya Muktapida. Later, Pratihara Vatsaraja (a local Ruler of Rajashtan) established hold over the region. According to Gwalior inscription, Vatsaraja with strong bow as his companion wrested the empire from the famous Bhandi clan. Soon the Thanesar region transferred its allegiance to the kingdom of Kanauj under the over-lordship of Dharmapala, the Ruler of Bengal. The next Pratihara Ruler Nagabhata II defeated Charampala and established his seat of power at Kanauj. From the *Skandapurana* and the Jaina Prabhavakacharita, it is gathered that Nagabhata's empire included *Brahmavatra* (the region between Saraswati and Drisadvati) and part of Eastern Punjab respectively. The district continued to be a part of the Pratihara empire is known from

¹ V.N.Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, pp.71-74.

two inscriptions of the time of Mihira Bhoja and Mahendrapala respectively found from the district.

That the region continued to be under the hold of Mahipala, the successor of Mahenrapala, can be gathered on the evidence of inscriptions, literary references and also Persian accounts¹. According to Bardic tradition and later inscriptions, the Tomars are associated with Haryana, their centre of power being Delhi. The Tomars were settled in Kurukshetra-Thanesar region at least from the 9th century A.D. when they came under the sway of the Pratihara empire after whose decline about the middle of the 10th century A.D. a scion of the tribe probably founded an independent principality around Delhi².

Because of its special geographical and strategic location, the district of Kurukshetra had to bear the brunt of the Turk invaders of Ghazni who were determined to capture Delhi. In this, task, the Tomars of Kurukshetra-Thanesar were helped by other Rajput Princes, specially the Tomars of Delhi whose kingdom comprised a considerable portion of Haryana. Mahmud, the son and successor of Sabuktigin, a Turkish Chieftain of Afghanistan, after defeating Jaipala and his son Anandapala, the Shahi Rulers of Punjab, marched on to Thanesar in A.D. 1011. Mahmud embarked on a definite policy of raiding the rich and politically unstable kingdom of India³.

On receipt of the news of Mahmud Ghazni's advance in A.D. 1014⁴, Vijaypal, the Tomar Raja of Delhi, in whose kingdom Thanesar was situated, sent messengers to other Hindu Chiefs requesting them to join together to defend the sacred city of Thanesar.

Mahmud marched with such rapidity through the Punjab as to forestall Vijaypal's preparations, and found the shrine at Thanesar undefended. He entered it without encountering serious opposition, plundered it of its vast treasures, and destroyed its idols except the

¹ H.A. Phadke, 'Haryana and the Gurjara-Pratihars', Haryana Research Journal, I, 1967, no.3; History of Kurukshetra, pp.75-8; History of Haryana, pp.116-23.

² Palam Baoli and Delhi Museum Inscriptions, Epigraphia Indica, V, appendix, p.34; I, 93f.

³ H.A. Phadke, History of Haryana, pp. 123-30; V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, pp.78-82

⁴ Ray Chaudhry, Datta and Majumdar, The Advanced History of India, 1956, .183.

principal object of worship which was sent to Ghazni to be buried in the public thoroughfare, where it might be trodden underfoot by the people¹.

Thereafter he sacked Mathura, Kanauj and annexed Punjab which was eventually placed under a Governor at Sonapat. After a few years of the death of Mahmud in A.D.1030, the Hindu Chief formed a confederacy under the auspices of Raja of Delhi to put an end to the Muslim rule. He succeeded in recapturing Hansi and Thanesar.

The country between the Sutlej and the Yamuna experienced relative peace for a century and half until the Ghuris appeared on the scene towards the end of the 12th century.

The district continued to be under the Chahamanas till the times of Prithviraja III when this part of India had to face renewed Turk invasions (A.D.1175-1192), this time of the Ghurids of Afghanistan. These invasions are narrated in a number of Muslim and Hindu sources. Muhammad Ghuri within five years became undisputed master of Punjab by overthrowing Khusrau Malik, the last Ghaznavi Ruler of Lahore and then captured Sarhind in the dominion of Prithviraja and passing through the district of Kurukshetra advanced further to meet the Chahamana forces at Tarain (a village in district Karnal). In the encounter that followed the Muslim army was routed by the fierce Rajput attack on its right and left wings (A.D.1191). The Sultan himself was severely wounded but had a providential escape, in the second battle of Tirawri (Taraori) which took place the next year (A.D.1192). The Rajput forces were, however, defeated.

The Rajputs were not prepared for a surprise attack. It was early morning when Prithviraja was sleeping and his soldiers were busy with morning duties when Ghori attacked. In such a situation, the Rajputs could not resist the invaders properly. About three O'clock in the Afternoon, when the Rajput forces were completely worn out, Ghori led his final charges with reserved troops and completely routed the Rajput forces. Prithviraja, who joined the battle late, tried to escape but was recognized, pursued, and captured in the

¹ W. Haig, The Cambridge History of India, 1958, p.18.

neighbourhood of Saraswati¹. He was beheaded later by the orders of the Sultan. Prithviraja's tragic end is also reflected in the *Virudhevidhvansa*, *Prithviraja-Prabandha* and the *Prabandhachintamani*, all near contemporary sources². Kurukshetra consequently passed into the hands of the Turks. Once again in the vicinity of Kurukshetra, Indian History took a decisive turn.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

After the demise of Shihabud-din-Ghuri, one of his Generals, Qutab-ud-din Aibak, laid foundations of the Turkish rule in north India in 1206. The territory now comprising Kurukshetra district became a part of his newly founded kingdom alongwith adjacent territories. In the contemporary literature, there is a reference to his having established only a military outpost here at Thanesar.

Aibak's death in 1210 brought chaos and confusion for a while. Aibak's successor Aram Shah was soon defeated by Iltutmish who enthroned himself as the Sultan of Delhi. Nasir-ud-din Qubadha, son-in-law of Aibak tried to fish in the troubled waters. He occupied the district, but his sway over it proved short-lived. Tajuddin-Yildiz the ruler of Ghazni, snatched it from him alongwith other territories. But Tajuddin Yildiz could not hold his sway for a longer period. He was defeated by Shamuddin Iltutmish at Taraori. Iltutmish extended his control over the areas consisting Kurukshetra district.

Iltutmish divided his kingdom into several *iqtas*. The present district of Kurukshetra roughly formed the *iqta* of Pipli. An officer called '*mukti*' was put in charge of the affairs of the *iqta* under the direct supervision and control of the Sultan³. Iltutmish was succeeded by his son Ruknuddin in 1240. He, however, proved incapable and was soon dethroned. Raziya occupied the throne. But after sometime, her nobles revolted against her.

After quelling the rebellion of the Governor of Punjab, Raziya returned to Delhi on March 15,1240, but on April 3 was compelled

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A.Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, pp. 85-90; Desarstha Sharma, Early Chauhan Dynasties, p.86.

² R.C. Majumdar (Ed.), The History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. I, The Struggle for Empire, Bombay, 1966, p.112.

³ K.C. Yadav, Haryana Ka Itihas, 1981, Vol.II, pp.32-33.

again to take the field. The Turkish nobles resented the power, and influence of Yakut and instigated Altunia, the Governor of Bhatinda, to rebel. When the army reached Bhatinda to suppress the rebels, the rebel nobles slew Yakut and imprisoned Raziya. Bahram, third son of Iltutmish was raised to the throne under the regency of Atigen.

The subsequent events disappointed Altunia who released Raziya and married her. He then moved towards Delhi with the object of replacing his newly-wedded wife on the throne, on October 13, 1240. Bahram defeated him near Kaithal and on the following day he and Raziya were murdered by the Hindus whom they had summoned to their assistance.

The district remained in almost chaotic conditions upto 1266 when Balban assumed power. He made frantic efforts to effect improvement in the situation. He set up military check-post at Thanesar and soldiers were drafted to defend these posts. He increased the numbers of *Iqtas*.

This arrangement continued up to 1290 when after the deposition of the last of the Mamluk Rulers Shams-ud-din, the district came under the control of the Khiljis. Jalal-ud-din, the founder of the Khilji dynasty ruled over the district. He even brought his staunch enemies to his side by his wise policy of reconciliation.

Muhammad Tughlaq's successor Firuz Tughlaq was a shade better as a ruler as far as the Kurukshetra district was concerned. He took some interest in the matter of administration of the district for the reason that one of his wives, a Hindu lady, belonged to a village near Thanesar¹. Her brothers Sadhu and Sadharan, men of local influence, became converts to Islam and served the Sultan. Sadharan received the title of Wajh-ul-Malik from the Sultan, and one of his successors became the founder of a ruling dynasty in Gujrat. Firuz also extended patronage to an accomplished Arabic scholar Maulana Ahmad Thanesari (who belonged to Thanesar as his name would suggest)².

Endowed with the virtues of piety and decency, Sikandar Lodhi held aloof from frivolous pursuits, engaging himself generally

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.100.

² H.A. Phadke, Haryana Ancient and Medieval, Delhi, 1990, p.120.

with the affairs of the state on which he worked strenuously. Unfortunately, the Sultan, deeply devoted to Islam, was intolerant of other faiths. Born of a Hindu mother and anxious to marry a Hindu princess, his attitude towards the religion of a vast majority of his subjects appears to be rather baffling and inexplicable, for it was bound to prejudice the realization of his political aims. Even as a prince, he had been dissuaded from raiding the Hindu tanks at Thanesar by a verdict of the famous divine, Mian Abdullah of Ajudhan, who had also ruled against the demolition of non-Muslim places of worship.

Humayun, succeeded Babur in 1530. But he ruled for a short period and was thrown out by an Afghan noble Sher Khan (the future Sher Shah) who kept the district under his effective control from 1540 to 1545 when he breathed his last. Sher Shah Suri once pursuing Humayun, passed through this region. At his camp at Thanesar, the theft of an army horse was reported to him. He then ordered the presence of all neighbouring Zamindars to find out the culprit failing which they were to face the consequences. It had the desired effect. Soon the culprit was brought before him and was immediately put to death. The anecdote not only shows the efficiency of Sher Shah's military administration but also the importance of Thanesar during medieval period as a halting station for the troops on their way to Lahore¹. Sher Shah Suri also undertook public reforms such as the construction of roads and *serais*. The longest of the roads built by him ran from Sonargaon (Bangla Desh) to the Indus, and passed through the district². He built two *serais* at Thanesar - one of the *serais* was built on the eastern bank of the Sannhit Tirtha south of Thanesar and another one was built to the north of the town. Besides this, the ruins of the bridge built by Sher Shah over a road can still be seen to the north of Thanesar³. There was peace, prosperity and tranquility everywhere during Sher Shah's rule. But he was succeeded by rulers who brought chaos and confusion.

¹ Tarikh-i-Daudi, Hindi Trnas. S.B.P. Nigam in Sura Vansa ka Itihas, p.400.

² V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984,p.105.

³ B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra: Political and Cultural History, 1978, p.74.

There are several references to Akbar's relations with this region. At the time of Humayun's death, Akbar was at Kalanaur (Panjab). On hearing the news about Hemu proclaiming himself as king of Delhi, Akbar proceeded to Delhi (October 1556). On his way to Delhi he halted at Thanesar for a few days and received the blessings of the famous saint Shaikh Jalal¹. Akbar marched again through this region in 1557 to deal with Sikhandar Shah who rebelled in Punjab.

In 1567, while Akbar was encamped at Thanesar, an extraordinary incident is said to have occurred, which shows a peculiar-trait of his character. The *sanyasis* or *faquirs* who assembled at the holy tank were divided into two parties which Abu-l-Fazal calls Kurus and Puris. The leader of the latter complained to the King that Kurus had unjustly occupied the accustomed sitting-place of Purus who were thus debarred from collecting the pilgrim's alms. Neither party listened to the friendly counsel. Both factions begged permission that the dispute be settled by fighting. The desired permission was granted, the hostile crowd assembled and the fight began with swords; one man on each side advancing in braggart fashion and starting the fray. Swords were discarded for bows and arrows, and these again for stones. Akbar, seeing that the Puris were out-numbered, gave the signal to some of his more savage followers to help the weaker party. The reinforcement enabled the Puris to drive the Kurus into heading flight. The vanquished were pursued and a number of them were killed².

He also visited Thanesar in 1581 accompanied by Prince Salim while on his march against Mirza Hakim and paid his second visit to Shaikh Jalal. His last visit to this area was in December, 1598³.

The district under Akbar formed a part of Delhi *Subah* and was included in *Sarkar* Sirhind. Thanesar was a *mahal* under *sarkar* Sirhind with an area of 2,28,988 *bighas*. This administrative set up remained intact upto the reign of Aurangzeb, 1707.

Thanesar became victim of iconoclastic fury of Aurangzeb. He destroyed the sacred temples at Kurukshetra and built a castle on the

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.106-7.

² V.A. Smith, Akbar the Great Mughal, 1966, pp.56,70.

³ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.107-9

island in the Brahmsar tank called Mughalpura from where soldiers could fire upon the pilgrims who came to bathe there. The remains of a castle with pillars on four sides are still visible. According to local tradition, the castle was demolished later by the Marathas, who also removed the pilgrim tax which required the Hindu pilgrims to pay a rupee for a small pot of water of the holy tank and five rupees for a dip in it¹.

During this period, Kurukshetra became a centre of the other religious sects, Sufism and Sikhism. Thanesar was one of the centres of the earliest sect of Sufis, the Chisties (the followers of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti). Another sect of Sufis, the Nakshabandis, also had its base at Thanesar under their leader Qutb Sahib. Hazrat Jalal-ud-din was the most outstanding sufi saint of the Chisti order connected with this region. Emperor Akbar visited Jalal-ud-din Thaneshari twice before the second battle of Panipat (1556) and at the time of Mirza Hakim's rebellion in 1581 to receive his blessings. An eminent scholar, Jalal Thaneshari also authored some books which include *Irshad-ut-Talibin*, *Irshad-al-Lataif*, *Tahaquq-z-Ardi-z-Hind* and a commentary on *sama*. He also established a *madrassa* at Thanesar. His nephew and son-in-law sheikh Nizam-al-din was his successor. Nizam-al-din too was a scholar of Islamic discipline and his famous works include *Sharah Sawani*, *Imam Ghazali*, *Sharh Lammiat*, *Tabsir Nizami* and *Risalah-z-Haqqiyah*. Prince Khusro had visited Shaikh Nizam during his revolt against his father Emperor Jahangir in 1605. Annoyed with the Shaikh due to his sympathy for the rebel prince, Jahangir banished him to Mecca. Subsequently Shaikh Nizam went to Balkh and died there in 1627. Another noted personality of this region was Saikh Abu-l-Fath of Thanesar, a profound scholar was acquired a thorough knowledge of Islamic traditions under Sayyid rafi-ud-din. Haji Sultan Thaneshari was another well-known personality of this region during Akbar's time. He had a phenomenal memory and could reproduce the religious texts verbatim. He was engaged by Akbar to translate the *Mahabhart*a into Persian².

¹ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984 p. 113.

² R.S. Sangwan, Sufi Saints of Medieval Haryana with Special Reference to Kurukshetra Region, in Kurukshetra Through the Ages, Kurukshetra, 1990, pp.116-18.

Shaikh Chehli was another great saint who gave prominence to Thanesar as a Centre of Sufi activity. According to Taz Karat-i-Aulia. Hazarat Shaikh Chehli was an Irani saint who came to India to meet Hazarat Kutab Jalal-ud-din at Thanesar and died here. He was buried in the tomb, now popularly known as Shaikh Chehli's *Maqbara*. It is a beautiful piece of Mughal architecture¹.

As stated earlier, Thanesar also became a centre of Sikhism during Mughal period. Nine out of ten Sikh Gurus are believed to have visited Kurukshetra². Many people became their followers and built several Gurudwaras to commemorate their visits. An account of them is available in the works of Macauliffe and the Sikh traditional literature of Bhai Santokh Singh³.

With Aurangazab's death in 1707, the Mughal Empire began to decline rapidly, and there followed a period of unexampled confusion and disorder in most of Northern India for about a century. The law of the sword was the only one then recognized. Kurukshetra was a part of the Royal *pargana* of the *Sarkar* Sirhind of *Subah* Delhi. Its fortunes were linked with that of the imperial capital⁴.

The Sikhs had emerged as a power to reckon with. Banda Bahadur who had settled in South India, came to Punjab in 1709 on the advice of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. He attacked and occupied *paraganas* of Thanesar and Shahabad in 1709 and brought these under his control along with other areas of Haryana. Banda appointed one Ram Singh as District Officer of Thanesar whose responsibility was to resist the Mughal troops from Delhi⁵. But this arrangement did not last long. Bahadur Shah defeated the Sikhs in 1710 and the Mughals recovered Thanesar and Shahabad.

After Banda's exit, the local Mughal officials became effective and the region once again came under Mughal control. But this situation did not continue for long. Thanesar lying *en route* to Delhi was naturally the prey to every free booter that chanced to come that

¹ B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra Political and Cultural History, 1978, p. 82.

² Ibid, pp. 77-80. (*it is believed that Guru Harkishan did not visit Kurukshetra, all others did.*)

³ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p. 117.

⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵ H.A. Phadke, Haryana: Ancient and Medieval, 1990, p. 166.

way. In 1739, a Turkoman freebooter Nadir Shah, launched a fierce attack on India. He also overran the district and people suffered untold miseries at the hands of his soldiers.

After Nadir Shah's return, there was chaos and confusion all around. Many powers came to fish in the troubled waters. Marathas seem to have been successful for the time being, when D.M. Hingane was appointed Governor of Kurukshetra by Mughal Emperor Alamgir, vide a Royal *firman* dated October 25, 1754. He also abolished the pilgrimage tax imposed on the Hindus visiting the *tirtha*¹. After Hingane had been in office for some time, Nizabat Khan, a freebooter (wrongly called Ruhella), attacked him and after driving him out became the independent Ruler of extensive territory around Kurukshetra. But his rule did not last long. He was defeated by Adina Beg, the Governor of Punjab². Adina Beg occupied Kurukshetra and wrote to Delhi that "*the Zamindars of this country are refractory and require force to keep them in order. If you intend to come here, bring with you a large army and abundant war material otherwise your coming would be inadvisable. Leave this territory to me*".³ The Wazir accepted the proposal and Kurukshetra became a part of kingdom of Adina Beg. He remained on the throne upto 1756 when Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked this region and broke his hold and annexed it along with other territories of *sarkar* Sirhind to his kingdom and placed it under Abdus Samad Khan⁴. But even this hold of Abdali did not last long. Abdul Samad Khan was turned out by the Marathas. The Marathas recognized the religious importance of Kurukshetra. Some female members of Malhar Rao's family went to Thanesar for a religious bath in January, 1758 on *Somavati amavas*, but the local force of Abdul Samad Khan besieged them in Shahabad. Maratha escort fought them bravely, killed many of the Afghans and seized their horses. Thus the women were rescued⁵.

Maratha's hold over the area was short-lived. Ahmed Shah Abdali again attacked India and the result was the Third Battle of Panipat (1761). The Marathas were defeated and the district once

¹ B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra: Plitical and Cultural History, 1978, p. 85.

² Hari Ram Gupta, Studies in Later Mughal History of Punjab, 1946, pp. 81-83.

³ Ibid, p.83.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ V.N. Datta and H.A. Phadke, History of Kurukshetra, 1984, p.126.

again passed into the hands of Ahmed Shah Abdali, who put it under his trusted lieutenant Zain Khan, the Governor of Sirhind.

After Abdali's exit from Punjab in December, 1762, the Sikhs appeared on the scene. On January 14, 1764, they defeated and killed Zain Khan, the Durrani Governor of Sirhind and took possession of the whole of Sirhind province so far as south Panipat. The noted Sikh Chiefs who commanded sub-contingents of troops under the *Misldars* at once dispersed in various directions and according to their strength seized what fell in the way of each. Mehar Singh Nirmla seized the *paragana* of Shahabad and Ismailabad. Sahib Singh and Gurdit Singh, the two brothers, seized Ladwa and Babain along with Indri and Shamgarh territories consisting of 117 villages. Bhai Mit Singh together with his two nephews Bhanga Singh and Bhag Singh, seized the territories of Pehowa and Thanesar¹.

After the advent of the Sikhs, anarchy continued to prevail in the Cis-Satluj country which was accentuated by internecine warfare among the Sikh Chiefs themselves. Sahib Singh Khondah, Dulcha Singh, Bhag Singh and other Sikhs attacked Thanesar to oust Bhanga Singh. They also asked Zabita Khan the Mir Bakshi of Delhi, to help them in expelling Desu Singh's son from Kaithal and to acknowledge their rule over Thanesar².

Sikhs continued to harass the *amil* (Mughal Officer in-charge) of Shahabad, who in spite of the precarious condition and repeated appeals, received no reinforcements. This fact greatly disheartened Mirza Shafi who was in charge of regular campaign against the Sikhs. In June, 1781, he sent Jai Singh Rai to Diwan Singh, Baghal Singh and Gurdit Singh to settle terms of peace. He offered Radaur, Babain and Shamgarh in return for the booty of Shahabad but the Sikhs did not agree. He was compelled to make peace with the Sikhs, generally on dictated terms³.

Gurdit Singh Ladwa and Ghulam Qadir entered Delhi on September 5, 1787. On September 8 the ungrateful Baghel Singh also joined Ghulam Qadir. The other Sikhs also went to his side. Only

¹ Karnal District Gazetteer, 1918, p. 21.

² Karnal District Gazetteer, 1976, p. 32.

³ Ibid, pp. 32-33.

Bhanga Singh of Thanesar and Begam Samru stood by the Emperor but they were helpless against the Rohillas and the Sikhs.

In September, 1795, Nana Rao Maratha came to the Cis-Satluj territory to release tributes from the Sikh Chiefs. He started fighting against Bhanga Singh. Some Sikh Sardars who were opposed to Bhanga Singh tried to excite Lal Singh to claim Thanesar as it originally belonged to his family. Lal Singh knew Bhanga Singh's nature and declined to entertain this proposal. The Sikhs then incited Nana Rao to demand a heavy tribute from Lal Singh whom they proclaimed to be very rich. Nana Rao took up the hint. Setting up his own government at Thanesar, he sent a message to Bhai Lal Singh to pay tribute. The Bhai protested against this high-handed action. He collected his own troops and sought assistance from Patiala. Nana Rao was greatly upset by the night attacks of the Sikhs on his camp. His own troops were suffering for want of water and food as all supplies from Thanesar were cut off by the Sikhs. Nana Rao retreated to Delhi. Bhanga Singh crept back to Thanesar as Marathas left¹.

MODERN PERIOD

Under The East India Company

Although the Marathas surrendered the district alongwith other territories to the British East India Company on December 30, 1803, vide the treaty of Sirji-Arjangaon² -the Sikh Chiefs who ruled over the most part of the district did not accept the sway of the new masters. Gurdit Singh and Bhanga Singh, the Chiefs of Ladwa and Thanesar respectively, formed a confederacy against the British of all the Sikh Chiefs (except for Bhag Singh of Jind and Lal Singh of Kaithal) and fought against them for some time. But owing to inferiority in strength and arms, the chief of Thanesar gave in. Ladwa Chief continued to resist. In April 1805, the British attacked him at the head of a big force and defeated him. Surprisingly, the worsted Chief was treated very leniently by the British. Only a part of his paternal *Jagir* that is *paragana* of Karnal was confiscated and the rest i.e. the *paragana* of Ladwa was restored to him³.

¹ Hari Ram Gupta, History of the Sikhs, Vol.IV, 1982, pp. 62-63.

² Aitchison, Treaties, Engagements and Sandas, Vol. IV, 1983, pp. 42-46.

³ Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol.III, No.2, 1971, pp.20-21.

Thus by April, 1805, the power of the Sikhs in Kurukshetra was broken and all their opposition, at least for the time being, was quelled. Yet the British were in no mood to hold the tract under their control directly; they let it remain in the hands of the original holders 'Under treaty from Marathas'¹.

Meantime, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab, who had consolidated his power there by now, started interfering with the affairs of the Sikh Chiefs. In consequence, they appealed to the British to come to their rescue. The British seized the opportunity with both hands and took proclamation of 1809².

For some time these chiefs ruled over their principalities the way they liked with no interference whatsoever from any quarter. But this situation underwent change in the 1830's when the British began to think of annexing these states. They acquired 2/5th part of Thanesar in 1832 and the rest 3/5th in 1850³. Ladwa was usurped in 1846. The transfer of Thanesar was smooth but not of Ladwa as the following account would show:-

Revolt of Ajit Singh of Ladwa

Gurdit Singh was succeeded by his son Ajit Singh who was gifted a title of Raja from Lord Auckland for building a bridge over Saraswati at Thanesar. Raja Ajit Singh of Ladwa was noted for his hatred for the British. The Delhi authorities naturally felt quite bad about it and wanted to see him off the *gaddi*. But to their great chagrin, they could not get any solid excuse to implement their scheme. Besides, his system of administration was criticized as corrupt and unpopular. For both these lapses his removal was suggested by one and all. How baseless these charges against the Raja were can be seen from the following observations of George Campbell, the Deputy Commissioner of Kaithal and Ladwa in 1840:-

"The Raja of Ladwa was by no means a model ruler- indeed, our officer had considered him a very bad one- yet when I wet into his revenue accounts and system,

¹ Journal of Haryana Studies, Vol.III, No.2, 1971, pp.20-21.

² J.D. Cunningham, History of Sikhs, 1972, Appendix XXXVI.

³ K.C. Yadav, The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana, 1977, p. 31.

I was surprised to find how regular everything was and how much that we had supposed to be high handedness was really very precisely regulated by custom and precedent and the subject of very exact accounts”¹.

By 1845, however, the Raja had become quite intolerable to the British. Accordingly he was pronounced a rebel, apprehended and put under surveillance at Saharanpur².

On the occasion of the outbreak of the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845), the Raja effected his escape. Having mobilized a contingent of several thousand of his people, he joined the Sikh army under Ranjit Singh, which had crossed the Jullundur Doab, in the neighbourhood of Ludhiana and fought. Early in January, 1846, while on his way to collect his family from his fief of Badowal (near Ludhiana), he invaded Ludhiana and burnt down the cantonment.

On January 21, in conjunction with the Sikh army under Ranjit Singh, he humbled a British force under Henry Smith at Badowal. After this, he fought at several other places on the other side of the Sutlej during the course of the war. After the First Anglo-Sikh war his state was confiscated and he died³.

The Uprising of 1857

Punjab had been annexed for a short time when trouble broke out in Meerut in May, 1857. Trouble soon spread to Delhi and Lucknow. These happenings disturbed the district authorities very much. Both on account of its proximity to Delhi and its location on the high road from Ambala, the Britishers could ill-afford any opposition in the district. They, therefore, made prompt appeal to the Chiefs of Patiala, Jind, Kunjpura and Karnal to help them retain their hold at least over the Grand Trunk Road, if not the whole district. These Chiefs, to their good fortunes, obeyed them at once. The Maharaja of Patiala came to Thanesar with 1,500 men and 4 guns on May, 15 with the purpose of suppressing the revolt. With troops of other

¹ George Campbell, *Memories of My Indian Career, 1858-59, 1893, Vol.I, p.58.*

² Lepel Griffin and Massery, *Punjab Chiefs and The Families of Note, Vol. II, 1940, p.39; J.D. Cunningham, History of the Sikhs, 1972, p. 271.*

³ *Ibid.*

neighbouring states, besides their own, the district authorities controlled the Grand Trunk Road and the main town situated on it¹.

The rebel army in Delhi took a serious view of the developments in the Thanesar district. In the third week of May, they dispatched a moveable column to undo the work of the Thanesar authorities and also to check British advance to Delhi. The people in the *parganas* of Ladwa and Pehowa rose up *en masse*. They drove out the revenue and police officials, made the loyalists surrender and destroyed all traces of the British rule in their localities. Lt. Pearson and Captain Mac Neil had a hard time in controlling the situation but later established their authority².

The Wahabi Movement

This movement was started by one Sayed Ahmed of Rai Bareilly in 1820's. To begin with, it aimed at liberating India from the clutches of infidels. Subsequently, it assumed anti-British stance. Haryana was an important centre of the movement with its headquarters located at Thanesar. One Jafar Muhammad, the Headman of Thanesar, was the beacon light behind the whole show³.

In fact he was the person who had first introduced the movement here and then spread it to almost every big town in this region, viz. Karnal, Panipat, Hisar, etc. Impressed by the piousness of Jafar's life and his 'singular sincerity and burning zeal for the regeneration of Muslims', Sayed Ahmed appointed him *Khalifa* or the official incharge of the Wahabi activity in the north-western region upwards of Delhi. Jafar, on his part, spared no pains to justify his selection to this honourable post. He helped the freedom fighters on the northwest frontier by supplying men, money and material. Not only that, in some of the frontier wars, he was personally present on the scene and fought many actions.

Jafar's activities went on unnoticed by the British government for many years. But in 1863 as ill-luck would have it, his seditious activities were noticed. Jafar was arrested, tried and was given very

¹ K.C. Yadav, *The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana*, 1977, pp. 68-69.

² *Ibid.*, p.69.

³ For details, see *Kurukshetra University Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. IV, pp. 98-102.

harrowing punishment-transportation for life (August 24,1864). His other associates were also severely punished.

With the exit of Jafar, the leading light of the movement and his associates, the Wahabi activities came to an end in Haryana. Thus the movement met its doom after 1864¹.

Political Awakening and Freedom Struggle

The terrible retribution affected after the War of Independence (1857) and the onslaughts after the Wahabi movement, had very adverse effects on the life of the people. As a result, they became backward in almost every walk of life. However, this condition was not to remain for long. In the last decade of this preceding century, as elsewhere, the wind of change (*Nai-Hawa*) began to blow here also. The spread of Western education influenced the people of middle class. In the beginning of the 20th century, Arya Samaj emerged as a vital force. Besides the religious activities, it centred its programmes in eradication of social evils and helping the poor and down-trodden. With the passage of time, Arya Samaj also became a movement for national awakening and number of Arya Samajists took active part in freedom struggle. The first branch of the Arya Samaj in the district was opened at Shahabad in 1893. Thanesar and Ladwa branches of the Samaj were opened in 1894 and 1900 respectively². Gradually, its influence also spread in the rural areas of the district. Arya Samaj also took keen interest in the spread of education in the district. The first Gurukul in Haryana was established at Kurukshetra in 1911 by Swami Shradhanand³. Arya Samaj had wide social base in the district. Singh Sabha was established at Kurukshetra in 1890 and Sanatan Dharam Sabha in 1892⁴. Both these Organisations also played an important role in bringing about religious and social awakening among people in the district.

By 1905, Congress also took roots in the district. Its influence began to be felt in some measures in the towns and in some villages in the district.

¹ For details, see Kurukshetra University Research Journal of Arts and Humanities, Vol. IV, pp. 98-102.

² K.C. Yadav, Haryana Ka Itihas, 1981, Vol. III, p.123.

³ S.C. Mittal, Haryana: A Historical Perspective, Delhi, 1986, p.68.

⁴ K.C. Yadav, Haryana Ka Itihas, 1981, Vol. III, pp. 124,126.

The discontented and disaffected masses of the district took part in the anti Rowlatt Bills agitation and so did their countrymen elsewhere. The government, however, took no notice of these protests and in March, 1919, passed one of the Rowlatt Bills called the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Act. The passage of Rowlatt Acts aggravated the situation. Mahatma Gandhi joined the agitation and advised passive resistance against these obnoxious Acts. Though movement against Rowlatt Acts was not as strong in the district as elsewhere but a *hartal* was observed at Ladwa on April 6, 1919 after mid day. On April 12, a number of Hindus and Sikhs visited Muhammadan *imambara* at Shahabad and made arrangements for a *hartal* on following day, as a result of which, complete *hartal* was observed at Shahabad on April 13¹. On April 18, an unknown Muhammadan presumed to be a resident of Delhi, came to Ladwa and convened a meeting which was attended by both Hindus and Muslims. He exhorted the people towards Hindu-Muslim unity².

Meantime, another anti-Government agitation was launched by the Muslims. The *Sultan* of Turkey, who was the *Khalifa* (Religious Leader) of the Muslim throughout the world, was treated shabbily by the British. The Muslims reacted very sharply to this and took a vow to fight this injustice done to their *Khalifa*. They formed All India Khilafat Committee for this purpose. Its Branches were opened at Shahabad and Thanesar in the district. Maulavi Inayat Ali was their leader here. He exhorted the people to rise against the Government. Gandhiji blessed *Khilafat* and as such Congressmen everywhere co-operated with the Muslims in their fight against the Government³.

The district authorities viewed these developments with concern and took strong measures to put down them. Inayat Ali and his active supporters were arrested and other people connected with the movement were harassed. The reign of terror was let loose on the masses. This had its impact and the movement began to fizzle out by July, 1920⁴.

¹ Report on the Punjab Disturbances, April 1919, p. 70

² District and Miscellaneous Reports on the Punjab, April 1919, p. 46.

³ Belu Maheshwari, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, A Case Study of Kurukshetra District, 1985, p. 20.

⁴ Ibid, p.21.

But soon after, Gandhiji launched his All India Non-Cooperation Movement which merged with the *Khilafat*. The Non-Cooperation Movement was very popular in Haryana but not so in Kurukshetra. Except for a few Khilafatists, Congress-men and Arya Samajists, the spirit of non-cooperation did not stir the district. The outsiders, Lala Duni Chand, Pt.Neki Ram, Lala Sham Lal who toured the district could not make any appreciable impact¹.

Gandhiji withdrew the Non-Cooperation Movement on February 12, 1922. This gave a serious set-back to the national movement almost everywhere. District Kurukshetra, where the movement was already weak, was the worst sufferer. The Congress activists over here got demoralized and their following dwindled still further. This explains why no political activity worth mentioning took place here for quite some time².

The situation continued to be so until 1929 when wind of change began to blow throughout the district. The coming of the Simon Commission, the death of Lal Lajpat Rai as a result of the lathi charge on him by the police and taking to the Purana Swaraj (complete independence) resolution by the nationalists stirred the people over here also. In October, Pandit Shri Ram Sharma, a veteran Congressman and freedom fighter, toured the district. He addressed meetings at some places. Sheikh Fateh Muhammad, Ganpat Rai, Ram Kishan and Bararasi Dass did likewise at Thanesar and elsewhere. As a result, Congress Committees were formed in all the towns in the district³. In almost all the towns and big villages, Independence Day was celebrated on January 26, 1930 in response to a call given by the Congress. As in other town of the State, a big procession was taken out on the occasion at Thanesar which was led by prominent Congressmen⁴.

Meanwhile, the Civil Disobedience Movement came (April 5, 1930). The Congress came in the open to fight the *Sarkar*. Public meetings were held in almost every town and big villages and

¹ Belu Maheshwari, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, A Case Study of Kurukshetra District, 1985, p. 20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid

⁴ Jagdish Chandra, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, 1919-1947, 1982, p. 88.

volunteers were enrolled to make the movement a success. The students and teachers especially of the DAV School, Shahabad and District Board School, Ladwa, took prominent part in the movement. Volunteers picketed wine shops and burnt foreign clothes at a number of places. Salt was prepared and arrests offered¹.

The Government viewed all these developments seriously and acted with a firm hand to improve the situation. To begin with, the Congress Organisation was declared unlawful. Leaders were arrested and ordinary Congress workers harassed. These measures, however, failed to have desired impact and the struggle went on unabated (except for a brief halt in 1931 when a sort of ceasefire was declared by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.)².

The Quit India Movement was also launched by the leaders throughout the country. The Government acted swiftly to crush the movement. As elsewhere, the Congress Organisation was declared unlawful and its activists were arrested. Yet the people came out to fight. Several of them offered *Satyagraha*³.

As a result of the arrest of leaders and repressive measures adopted by the Government, the movement could not make much headway in the district.

As at home, the people of the district made sacrifices to the cause of national freedom outside India also. About 54 soldiers from here joined the Indian National Army (INA) and fought against the British forces under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose⁴. Though the INA lost the war, its soldiers went back home after their release, gave great boost to the nationalist activities and the national movement. As a result, the social base of the freedom struggle bore

¹ Belu Maheshwari, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, A Case Study of Kurukshetra District, 1985, p.20; File No. A/14/1930 (Haryana State Archives).

² Ibid.

³ For Details of the 1942 movement, see Jagdish Chandra, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, 1982, pp 110-11; K.C. Yadav, Haryana Ka Itihas, Vol.III, 1981, pp. 190-91; Belu Maheshwari, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, A Case Study of Kurukshetra District, 1985, p.25-27

⁴ B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra Political & Cultural History, 1978, pp. 152-57.

fruit and India became free on August 15, 1947¹. The district remained a part of Punjab until November 1, 1966 and thereafter State of Haryana was formed. To begin with, Kurukshetra was a part of Karnal district, but in 1973 Karnal was bifurcated and the district of Kurukshetra came into existence. On November 1, 1989 with bifurcation of Kurukshetra district, new district of Kaithal was carved out.

¹ Belu Maheshwari, Freedom Struggle in Haryana, A Case Study of Kurukshetra District, 1985, p. 26.